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Ferdinand E. Marcos

# Social Integration in Southeast Asia

# SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN SOUTH ASIA

by President Ferdinand E. Marcos

WE HAVE OFTEN been reminded by scholars that the concept of "Southeast Asia" is an idea still searching for unity and integrity. Used as an expression to denote the aggrupation of countries occupying the southeastern corner of the Asiatic continent, the term is of relatively recent vintage. Also, we are reminded that this concept has enjoyed an elasticity of meaning through the years.

But this, I feel, may be said in support of the concept of "Southeast Asia" today: All the nations and the communities said to belong to this region, regardless of the wide disparity of culture and race, today desire community and regional identity. We have built for ourselves the forums and mechanisms for fostering contact and exchange among ourselves. And larger than this, we are rapidly evolving a common outlook that is not specifically Indonesian or Malaysian or Thai or Filipino but "Southeast Asian."

Nor is this emerging integrity of Southeast Asia merely subjective. It does not exist alone in the minds and aspirations of Southeast Asian leaders or intellectuals, though they are indeed the precursors of its emergence. Geography and history have conspired to give the region, as one scholar has written, "if not the unity of a common cultural and spiritual heritage, at least the bonds of mutually shared problems." And these bonds continually issue in greater contact and cooperation, and even in common aspirations and goals.

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*(Speech delivered at the multination conference on majority-minority relationship in Southeast Asia, Maharlika Hall, 8 May 1974)*

The paradox of cultural diversity in a region that aspires to oneness reflects a common problem today of the nation-states of Southeast Asia. We are a region of diverse cultures and races, and each of us are nations of discrete cultural and ethnic groupings. This pervasive stratification of one nation into many communities within our region poses its own difficult and complex problems to our avowed goal of development and modernization.

Certainly, this is not a new problem to us. Certainly, it is one that has long been recognized by our respective societies, a recognition preceding in fact our respective rise to independence and qualifying today our efforts to mold strong and progressive societies. But we must admit that this is an area in which we have not been perhaps entirely successful. We know often enough that in the aftermath of hard-won efforts to establish solidarity within our nations, at the moment when we have a sense of harmony among cultural groups, we are subsequently disabused of our illusions by the fresh surge of group conflict and differences. This is true of the Philippines, this is true of other countries in this region.

I REFER to the Philippines because it was once said to be the nation of Southeast Asia that most approximately reaches homogeneity. We have come face to face with what is often referred to as Christian-Muslim harmony, not so much with respect to the oft-quoted and recent conflict in Mindanao which has complex roots, as with respect to our policy of integrating all our communities or assimilating, as some would refer to the original policy, which we have modified, into the national body politic. In our present effort to achieve full national development, we have realized the important and intractable character of majority-minority relations in the planning and design of our development program.

If there has been any failure in our societies in the handling of majority-minority problems, it seems to me that one of the possible reasons has been the tendency to look at the problem of the heterogeneous society along specialized lines and features of interest. This is immediately evident in the fact that whenever we refer to the

problem, we either speak of it as "the problem of minorities," or "the problem of communalism," or the problem of "the plural society." These spheres of inquiry are, of course, highly important and necessary, but there has been altogether an absence of an overview or perspective on the cultural and ethnic diversity of Southeast Asian society.

If I may illustrate the point, again in the context of the Philippine environment or situation, I have noticed with increasing concern that we have yet to integrate into a unified vision our perception of the so-called Muslim problem in our country, the Chinese presence, and the integrationist approach of our tribal minorities. Certain scholars feel that the Chinese problem must be discussed in the context of "the plural society," but that the situation of our cultural minorities is a "problem of minorities." It is, of course, undeniable that the problems we encounter with cultural minorities are different from those we face in the alien presence. But there is an invaluable insight to be gained from an earnest effort to thread together these various sources of tension in our societies into a unified area of study. The truth of the matter is that this is seriously deficient today.

This is a crucial effort that must be made by our societies in the light of our desire to weld together our peoples for the singular drive toward national development.

Governments are either suspect or inclined toward prejudice. Intellectuals and the members of academic circles are perhaps better qualified to make an objective and dispassionate study of the problem.

THE SUBJECT of "the majority-minority situation in Southeast Asia" introduces a vantage point in the diversity problem of our region, which encompasses within its field of vision the various aspects of the problem: the cultural, the ethnic, the economic, the linguistic, and the political.

And I am also specially gratified to learn that our higher institutions of learning are now engaged in inquiry into this common burden of our people.

I believe I speak for all of the governments of Southeast Asia when I say that your inquiry into majority-minority relations is even now being viewed as a possible determinant of policy decisions and program planning. For this conference takes place at a time of evolving relationships between our political institutions and our institutions of higher learning.

As the development process has broadened our perspectives and focused understanding of our conditions, there has been an increasing reliance of our governments on the contribution of scholarship, learning and research of the universities to the understanding of national problems. Here, in the Philippines, the truly salutary aspect of this relationship is the creative association of educators and scholars with men in government who are engaged in development programs. In some instances, the scholars themselves have participated in putting down in policy form their recommendations in the development program.

The present inquiry into majority-minority relations in Southeast Asian society is of a piece with this overall tendency. This is an inquiry that the higher institutions of learning are most fully prepared to make. Our governments have ceased to talk down to this problem of majority-minority relations; that much is certain. Today, I believe, they are also prepared and determined to place their hopes of finding a viable solution to this problem on a deeper understanding of its complex roots and manifestations, and a tailoring of policies and programs to this knowledge.

This inquiry will not end in success overnight, for the problem is complex, and even older than each of our societies. We can be certain, however, that in this multinational inquiry a substantive start at resolution will be made, and each nation represented here will gain new perspective on its society from the exchange of concepts and studies here.

This, at any rate, is the fundamental goal of this conference and its central relevance to what is happening in Southeast Asia today.

Now with respect to the Philippines and this special ceremony which I am doubly honored to participate in, as the recipient of the doctor of laws, *honoris causa,* from the Mindanao State University.

I remember that the Mindanao State University was threatened with extinction in the latter part of 1972. It was occupied by some of our misguided friends who employed unorthodox means to take over the University from the administration of Dr. Tamano. I remember we had to pull out Japanese Ambassador Urabe by means of a deep penetration operation. We even found him in Muslim attire inside the University.

I referred to this because it has relevance to the Philippine situation. Slight misunderstandings between the various groups and leaderships can alter so much. In our case, we are happy that one of the leaders of the operation to capture the University, Chief of Police Sakar Basman, is now a member of my staff, working constructively for the development of Mindanao.

At the same time, I remember that one of the instructors or professors in the University, who participated in taking over the radio and telecommunications facilities of the University to broadcast a message to all Muslims in the area which was somehow misunderstood, is now also a member of my staff, working with the Task Force for the Reconstruction and Development of Mindanao.

THIS BRINGS to mind the question of the doctor of laws, *honoris causa.* I presume that it may sound ironic to our foreign guests why the rule of law, which I support and espouse, has been used as a paragon, showing vestments of distinction, whereas, in a way of speaking, I have suspended some of the people's rights under martial law.

It will be noted that the citation speaks of Constitutional rights. Very discreetly, it does not use the term *martial law.* However, the task of the political leadership in a country like ours, I have discovered, is more of informing and communicating rather than explaining. The facts, therefore, that I would like to mention now are well known to everybody in the Philippines, but for the information of our foreign guests, I would like to recount the events that led to the proclamation of martial law on September 21, 1972.

Sometime in 1971 the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus was suspended in accordance with the martial-law provision in our Constitu-

tion. This provision is found in the old Constitution, meaning the 1935 Charter.

This Constitution provides that the President shall be the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and he may call upon the Armed Forces to quell any disorder, riot, or rebellion. But the more important provision reads as follows: "In the event of invasion, insurrection, rebellion, or imminent danger thereof, when the public safety requires it, he may suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus or proclaim martial law throughout the Philippines or any part thereof." I think I quoted that provision accurately and well. I should, because the Chief Justice and the members of the Supreme Court are here. Before them a case was brought, questioning my proclamation suspending the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus. The high court sustained the government possition.

You see, we are a strange country. We have a situation where martial law has been proclaimed and yet, the President can be brought before the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court can still judge the wisdom, or the constitutionality of the action of the President.

The action of the President in proclaiming martial law was also brought to the Supreme Court. If, indeed, I was martial-law administrator by the standards of the Western Constitutionalists, then I should have been above the Supreme Court. This was not so.

In proclaiming martial law I was faced with the question of declaring a revolutionary government, abolishing the entire civil government in the process. This would have given the leadership the opportunity to establish peace and order and stability merely by executive fiat, without the participation of any other government institution.

The choice was whether to adhere to the Constitution or to establish a completely new, revolutionary government. The arguments in favor of a revolutionary government were strong and persistent, centering around the idea that it was easier to build a new house than to reconstruct and repair one that is old and broken down. However, it was my feeling that force was not the only available means to bring about reform in a democratic government, although the

history of many nations shows that whenever there was any need for some radical reforms, radicalization was brought about by violence.

However, it was my feeling that the crisis mechanism provided in our Constitution could be used not only to dismantle the apparatus of rebellion and anarchy but also to bring about reforms that would remove the causes of rebellion.

This, despite the fact that the crisis mechanism was a carry-over from a colonial government that sought to consolidate power for the preservation of the status quo.

This decision spelled violence to the Western mind. This is what is unacceptable to those trained in Western Constitutionalism – that martial law should be used for reform rather than for the maintenance of the status quo. And I presume that when the Board of Regents agreed to grant me this doctorate, *honoris causa,* they must have read that book I am about to finish, entitled *Martial Law and the Constitution,* wherein I explained the various motivations for the proclamation of martial law, rather than a declaration of a revolutionary government that would have taken over all powers.

I ALSO FEARED that in a revolutionary government, every man with a gun would become a law to himself. I have always maintained that individuals are incidental, that we are all unimportant and inconsequential, compared to the principle that violence must be avoided, that reform must be brought about by the consent of the people, from whom power emanates.

Thus, we submitted the new Constitution to the people for ratification in January 1973. The Charter was ratified. The matter of its ratification was brought before the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court ruled that there was no legal obstacle to the enforcement of this Constitution. Therefore, the new Constitution is in force by virtue of the ratification by our people.

Thus, the present administration is described as Constitutionally authoritarian. There are some who ask, under what authority do you now exercise power? And my answer is simple. By authority of the new Constitution, ratified in January 1973. Further again, to settle some questions raised, we submitted the matter of

the powers of the President to a referendum in July 1973. In this referendum, I lifted the effects of martial law and allowed full discussion and free debate, and the referendum resulted in a support of the exercise of the powers by the President under the new Constitution. This, then, is the genesis of the present situation.

This administration, therefore, is a transitory phase. It is a step toward the ultimate adoption of the institutions established by the new Constitution, including a Parliament. We ultimately will end up with the Parliament in the Philippines. This matter, being political in nature, will be submitted to the people for decision.

Again, this relates to the matter of majority-minority relations in the Philippines. If martial law is to serve any purpose at all, then it should be able to extirpate the causes of rebellion by restructuring society and by removing inequities inherent in the old order.

Our foreign guests will often hear references to the new society. The new society is the effort to restructure the old society, to eliminate the causes of rebellion by removing inequity, inequality, injustice and by giving everybody equal opportunity in its true meaning.

Thus, when we proclaimed land reform and declared that the tenants shall henceforth own the land they were tilling, the declaration included not only Christians but all Filipinos, Muslim, non-Muslim, Chinese as well as the native Filipinos. And when I proclaimed further that every 15-year-old shall belong to the barangay with the right to vote, that order covered everyone, irrespective of religion and racial heritage.

THE PHILIPPINES, like most of the developing world, consists of a collectivity of various ethnolinguistic groups or cultural communities, and I refer to this because, in many instances, the policy of the Philippines is referred to as assimilation or integration. Actually, the Philippines has gone beyond mere integration, beyond mere assimilation.

I have gone beyond the mere concept of national integration to the extent that integration connotes an interpenetration of cultures. Our basic assumption is that the social philosophies and beliefs of our cultural communities

have a least common denominator in terms of universal human ideals such as peace, equality, freedom, brotherhood and the like. It is our hope that by strengthening these cultural communities with their own body of beliefs, we will ultimately create a condition where the particular interests of these cultural minorities and communities will converge at one point in time such that further fulfillment of their aspirations can only be realized through the larger framework of the Filipino nation.

Hence, I view all religious forces and civilizations that have come to our shores as the heritage of the entire Filipino nation. The Islamic religion is a heritage of the entire nation as much as it is a heritage of our Muslim brothers. There are controversies as to the source of the original Filipinos but one thing is certain, the story of migration cannot be adequately explained by the present theories.

Thus it is that many of those who come from my part of the country or from Pampanga or from Manila can trace their lineage to the original Muslim in Malaya and Indonesia, especially Sumatra. It is a heritage, therefore, common to all Filipinos.

The Christian religion is also a heritage of our entire people as much as it is a heritage of the Christian Filipinos. The Malay civilization is a heritage of the entire nation as much as it is a heritage of the Chinese, the Indian and all other national communities in our midst.

The basic thrust in our present enterprise of nation building, therefore, is to so strengthen and reinforce all our ethnic groups and cultural communities in order that each of them may be able to acquire the capacity to transcend their particular restricted interests and commit themselves to the larger community which is the Filipino nation.

When our cultural communities have realized that their potentialities, needs and aspirations can only be achieved through the framework of the national community rather than the framework of an ethnic group, we shall have attained our goal. Toward this end, therefore, it is the national policy to involve all our cultural communities in nation building, from conception to planning, and resource allocation to im-

plementation of program, including coordination and supervision. This was the reason for the proclamation of amnesty for all those who may have participated in anarchy, rebellion, or acts against the government. Thus it is that we extended full pardon to all the leaders in the Marawi incident, in Jolo, in Basilan, Zamboanga del Sur, Cotabato, and in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur.

AT THIS JUNCTURE, I would like to announce an experiment which we are conducting in the Philippines. I take this historic occasion to announce to the intellectual guides of the Asian academe an innovative special experiment to return power to our people. During the recent conflict in Jolo, all the registered titles to privately owned lands were burned. If we are to follow the normal legal procedures of justice or administrative reconstitution of titles, it would take a rather long time and entail considerable expenditure and cause further conflict. I have decided, therefore, that all the lands within the territorial boundaries of the municipality of Jolo will be titled in the name of the entire community and turned over to all the residents subject to approval by referendum by the people of Jolo.

The principal aspects of this policy are:

1. All the private agricultural lands which include all residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural lands will be owned by the community.

2. The lands will be administered by the municipality or what I may create as the Free Trade Zone or by any designated competent authority with the affirmation of the people.

3. All those who have titled lands will have two options, either to accept land exchange wherein land of the same value but not necessarily of the same area owned by the government in the nearest municipality will be given to these landowners or to accept a perpetual lease over the same land provided they will develop it in accordance with the development plans for Jolo.

All residents may be entitled to a home lot for residential purposes under a perpetual lease with nominal rent. The real-estate tax shall be abolished on all communal lands in Jolo. All commercial and industrial lands will be leased

for 25 years and renewable for another 25 years at reasonable rentals.

This policy is aimed at the possible return to our original barangay concept of communal ownership of land. The new society seeks to strengthen and re-establish our indigenous institutions in order to realize our objective that all our patrimony and wealth shall belong to the nation. We are determined to democratize all aspects of Philippine society, including property ownership. This policy of communalizing the ownership of land shall be embodied in a Presidential decree to be submitted to the people of Jolo in a referendum. This policy is also in accordance with Islam and the laws of the Muslims of the Philippines.

At the same time, it is my intention to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to sequester, separate, identify and determine the boundaries of all ancestral lands of all cultural minorities in the Philippines, from the Muslims to the Igorots and the Ilongots who had tribal meetings recently to organize themselves in Northern Luzon along the boundaries of Quezon, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino. By virtue of Presidential Decree No. 410, enacted on March 11, 1974, the government recognized the traditional rights of the national cultural communities to all their ancestral lands. The cultural communities are the national ethno-linguistic groups in our country. This decree provides that the land occupancy certificates shall be issued to the claimants by the district land officer. All reservations for government and quasi-government purposes are under study to ensure that the ancestral lands of the national cultural communities will be given to them. In the event of any conflict, it is also my intention to see to it that these lands shall be communal lands owned by the entire community, if so approved by the various cultural minorities.

These are the experiments which we wish to bring to the attention of the intellectuals of this organization. It is also my intention to declare within the experiments' scope all the lands that have been included in reservations, especially the two big reservations set up for the Tboli and the Higaonon tribes. The Tboli tribe in Cotabato was granted a reservation by Proclamation No. 697 in June 1970. I reserved 5,224 hec-

tares of rich agricultural lands in southern Cotabato for the sole use of the Tboli's, who were then considered primitives but who have now proved themselves able contributors to our economy, like the other members of our society.

So I have issued Presidential Decree No. 407 creating the municipality of Tboli, composed of 118,000 hectares of land. Today this municipality is a thriving community, just as dynamic as any other progressive community. Within this area there are ancestral lands. I hereby also declare such ancestral lands as communal property belonging to the tribe of the Tboli. I also declare the area set aside for the Higaonons as a part of their ancestral lands.

I refer to these particular experiments of the Philippine government in order to emphasize our inclination not merely to assimilate the Muslims, Tbolis, Higaonons, Ibanags, and Igorots into the Christian communities but also to allow their development in their pristine purity, thus attaining unity in diversity which we have long sought for. □

A publication of the
Department of Public Information

Produced by the
Bureau of National & Foreign Information
5th Floor, Tuazon-Gonzales Building
Solana St., Intramuros, Manila
Philippines